FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Pennsylvania Women’s Agricultural Network (PA-WAgN) is launching a women farmer mentoring program to connect established farmers with new and beginning farmers, aspiring farmers, and seasoned farmers. The mentor program will encourage women farmers to support each other through shared learning and exchange of experiences in workshops and online forums focused on five topic areas: fruit and vegetable cultivation, dairy and cheese production, urban agriculture and nutrition, on-farm education and value-added products, and livestock production.

The mentoring program values women farmers as leaders of change by providing educational opportunities to foster healthy food systems; promote farming livelihoods; expand and strengthen networks; foster stewardship of land, people, and resources; and support financial and environmental sustainability.

Women farmers in Pennsylvania are encouraged to join the mentor program by participating in various events scheduled during the 2013 growing season. These events are designed to expand participants’ farming potential through on-farm educational gatherings, farminars, workshops, networking events, and one-on-one communications with mentors delegated to the five specialty areas.  Beginning in March 2013, mentors will offer the following on-farm educational events:

* March 26 Value-Added Goat Dairying at Wayside Acres Goat Dairy & Creamery (Perry County)
* April 9 Organic Vegetable at Blackberry Meadows Farm (Allegheny County)
* June 10 Value-Added Farming at Quiet Creek Herb Farm and School of Country Living (Jefferson County)
* June 26 Urban Farming at Joshua Farm (Dauphin County)
* July 12 Transitioning to Mob Grazing at Yeehaw Farm (Perry County)

For those unable to attend the mentor program’s on-farm events, PA-WAgN will offer farminars as a virtual field day experience. These farminars will be presented by the mentors on topics related to their area of expertise.

Additional details and online registration for these events are available at <http://agsci.psu.edu/wagn/events> or contact Ann Stone at 814-863-4489 or ams39@psu.edu.

Women farmers serving as mentors and their area of expertise are:

Judi Radel, Livestock Production Specialty Mentor, farms at Yeehaw Farm. Beef and dairy cattle, pigs, dairy goats, sheep, turkeys, chickens (layers and meat birds), geese, ducks, and guineas are moved in rotation over the 160 acres of her 4th generation farm. Along with her family, she also grows heritage grains and a wide variety of vegetables and fruits, which are marketed through a whole diet CSA, meat CSA, farm store, and farmers markets.

Jen Montgomery, Vegetable Production Specialty Mentor, and her husband operate Blackberry Meadows Farm. They manage 13 of the 85 acre farm as a certified organic vegetable operation for a 150 CSA membership and two farmers markets, serving the Pittsburgh region. They grow over 100 different varieties of vegetables (and some fruits) and have an established intern/apprentice program.

Claire Orner, On Farm Education Specialty Mentor, and her husband run Quiet Creek Herb Farm and School of Country Living, a 501(c)3 non-profit. They grow a wide variety of herbs and produce value-added products (soap, season mixes and teas) for an on-farm gift shop. Their classes and intensive workshops include everything from Shiitake mushroom cultivation to earthen building, holiday wreath-making and medicinal use of herbs.

Kirsten Reinford, Urban Agriculture Specialty Mentor, manages Joshua Farm. This one-acre urban farm cultivates more than 40 kinds of vegetables for a 40 member CSA, weekly farm stand, and sales to restaurants. The farm partners with a variety of organizations to offer youth employment opportunities and service-learning experiences.

Cathy and Gwen Soult, Dairy Production Specialty Mentors, are a mother-daughter duo who operate Wayside Acres Goat Dairy, a 250 head dairy goat farm in Newport, PA.  Cathy has had goats for over 30 years, and has experienced most, if not all, the bumps in the road involved in goat ownership.  Gwen, who has recently moved back to the farm to become a co-manager, has helped with the management of young/dry stock since 1993-intermittently, since she had to navigate middle and high school and undergraduate and graduate school during that time. Currently, they are permitted by the PA Department of Agriculture for on- and off-farm raw milk sales, and cheese making, and soon they will be going Grade A with bottled, pasteurized milk.

PA-WAgN supports women in agriculture by providing positive learning environments, networking, and empowerment opportunities. For complete details visit <http://agsci.psu.edu/wagn>.

This program was organized by the Pennsylvania Women’s Agricultural Network with funds by USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture Grant #2012-49400-19602

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